

**REMARKS FOR CHARGE D' AFFAIRES, A.I. GEETA PASI
BIISS/APCSS WORKSHOP ON
“DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE, AND SECURITY REFORMS”**

August 12, 2007

DHAKA, AUGUST 12 -- Your Excellency President Iajuddin Ahmed, Ambassador Osmany, Lieutenant General Smith, participants and guests, it is a pleasure to address you.

This workshop on “Democracy, Governance and Security Reforms” presents a timely opportunity to reflect upon the evolution of Bangladesh’s political and security environment. It will provide a lively forum to discuss the democratic process.

I hope your discussions will not be limited to academic issues but will instead produce practical recommendations on the way forward for democratic transition, focusing on governance and security sector reforms. I expect your recommendations to reflect and synthesize the broad spectrum of opinions in Bangladesh so they can be put to good use by policy makers.

Bangladesh has entered an unprecedented period of reform since January 11. As Bangladeshis seek to determine a path for this country that is free of corruption, violence, and political feuding, the foundation you lay during this interim period is crucial. The foundation must support the finished structure—if it is built with democratic principles and respect for human rights at its core, then freedom, productivity and stability can flourish. But...if the foundation is laid with elements that are themselves undemocratic, the future of the democratic system itself will be jeopardized.

In a democracy, the role of the security sector is vital to ensure that sovereignty and public safety are preserved and that law and order are respected. Without such guardians, the democratic system can be threatened from within by dangerous factional struggles and blatant disregard for the greater good. But the ultimate responsibility for governing must rest squarely on the shoulders of civilian government—an elected body representing diverse groups within society that governs justly and conscientiously. Sadly, history is replete with examples of military leaders who have unwisely left the barracks, much to the detriment of their country and their own institution.

No one disputes the military’s key supporting role in this process. This role has been successfully assumed by some of history’s most esteemed military leaders. At the same time, those who have modified the part have often been judged as, in the words of America’s first President, George Washington, “inauspicious to liberty.” One of America’s greatest generals, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was mindful of this when he cautioned his colleagues in the civilian government to constantly be on guard against “unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought,” of the military sector. “The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will exist,” he said.

While such “misplaced power” can erode the success of a government, security forces can do much good if properly focused. For its part, Bangladesh’s military has proven its skills at home and around the world, including in United Nations peacekeeping operations. For example, the military is currently engaged in life-saving relief efforts in response to the floods.

The State of Emergency has provided Bangladeshis an opportunity to rewrite their political future. They have lent their support to the civilian caretaker government and the military in efforts to combat corruption and rebuild political institutions that will sustain and support democracy. This opportunity brings sobering responsibilities for both the civilian and military leadership to fulfill their roles to the best of their ability, respecting the distinctions between them.

The United States has extended our support to the interim government during this State of Emergency. We support its goal of conducting free, fair and fully participatory elections by the end of 2008 and the restoration of a democratic system. We recognize that this is a formidable task, and I urge you to exercise your power to assist wisely and with great care, whether you are tasked with a civilian or a military role.

Anti-corruption efforts are a key component of the interim government’s mandate. Corruption has too long robbed Bangladeshis of the fruits of their labors. It must not go unpunished. In calling corrupt individuals to account, however, the government must hold itself accountable to the international standards of due process and human rights.

The rights of the accused, in corruption cases as well as other cases, must be respected for these prosecution efforts to lead to an era of greater freedom and justice. So-called “secret” detentions, abuse of detainees, and deaths in custody are unacceptable. They are detrimental to the credibility of the government’s reform process. Such incidents should be investigated and prevented from reoccurring.

Anti-corruption efforts and the pursuit of justice with due process are only part of a successful reform process. Building independent institutions is also important. We support electoral reform, including the development of an improved voter list and the laying out of a roadmap that leads to free, fair and credible elections by the end of 2008. We are prepared to expand our assistance to Bangladesh in this regard.

We have consistently urged that the ban on politics be lifted as soon as possible. Building a new political system requires dialogue. Politicians must be part of the reform dialogue.

This does not mean that the knowledge and expertise of those in the military sector cannot be brought to bear on the reform dialogue. This conference provides an excellent opportunity to develop reforms for the security sector that will accompany political reforms and enhance the success of both.

This workshop is an example of the productive and mutually beneficial relationship between the United States and Bangladesh. We are eager to assist when and where we can in facilitating democratic governance, prosperity, and stability. We are pleased to co-sponsor this conference.

You will address the duties and challenges that lay before the caretaker government and military during this unique period in Bangladesh’s history. Before closing, I would like to acknowledge the strong

collaboration between BIISS and APCSS. I am sure this workshop will contribute to more contacts and exchanges between scholars and security experts of our two countries. I wish you a very productive workshop. Thank you.

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